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ABSTRACT

Three practical ways to get the meaning from printed words quickly and efficiently are: (1) previewing; (2) skimming; and (3) clustering. Previewing and skimming are ways of getting through a lot of reading material without reading every word. Previewing is especially helpful for heavy reading like long articles, business reports, and nonfiction books. When previewing, read the entire first two paragraphs, then read only the first sentence of each successive paragraph, and finally read the entire last two paragraphs. Skimming is good for short, light reading. The reader's eyes should sweep across each line of material, picking up only a few key words in each line. These techniques give a fast, general idea of content. To read faster and understand more, use clustering. Clustering is looking at groups of words instead of one word at a time. This takes constant practice. Pick up something light to read. Concentrate on clustering the first time through, then reread it normally to see what was missed. Practice this 15 minutes every day; it may take a week or more to pick up this technique. (DC)

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HOW TO READ FASTER
POWER OF THE PRINTED WORD

by

Bill Cosby

International Paper Company

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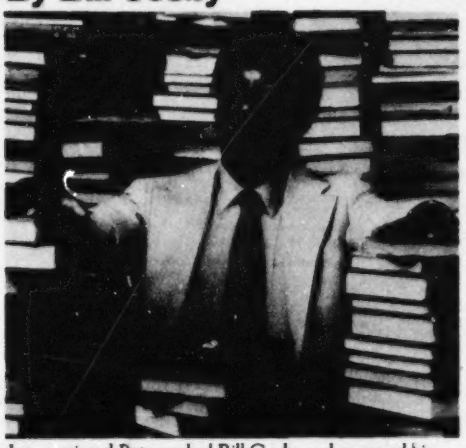
How to read faster

By Bill Cosby



International Paper asked Bill Cosby—who earned his doctorate in education and has been involved in projects which help people learn to read faster—to share what he's learned about reading more in less time.

When I was a kid in Philadelphia, I must have read every comic book ever published. (There were fewer of them then than there are now.)

I zipped through all of them in a couple of days, then reread the good ones until the next issues arrived.

Yes indeed, when I was a kid, the reading game was a snap.

But as I got older, my eyeballs must have slowed down or something! I mean, comic books started to pile up faster than my brother Russell and I could read them!

It wasn't until much later, when I was getting my doctorate, I realized it wasn't my eyeballs that were to blame. Thank goodness. They're still moving as well as ever.

The problem is, there's too much to read these days, and too little time to read every word of it.

Now, mind you, I still read comic books. In addition to contracts, novels, and newspapers. Screenplays, tax returns and correspondence. Even textbooks about how people read. And which techniques help people read more in less time.

I'll let you in on a little secret. There are hundreds of techniques you could learn to help you read faster. But I know of 3 that are especially good.

And if I can learn them, so can you—and you can put them to use *immediately*.

They are commonsense, practical ways to get the meaning from printed words quickly and efficiently. So you'll have time to enjoy your comic books, have a good laugh with Mark Twain or a good cry with *War and Peace*. Ready?

Okay. The first two ways can help you get through tons of reading material—fast—*without reading every word*.

They'll give you the *overall meaning* of what you're reading. And let you cut out an awful lot of *unnecessary* reading.

1. Preview—if it's long and hard

Previewing is especially useful for getting a general idea of heavy reading like long magazine or newspaper articles, business reports, and nonfiction books.

It can give you as much as half the comprehension in as little as one tenth the time. For example, you should be able to preview eight or ten 100-page reports in an hour. After previewing, you'll be able to decide which reports (or which *parts* of which reports) are worth a closer look.

Here's how to preview: Read the entire first two paragraphs of whatever you've chosen. Next read only the *first sentence* of each successive paragraph. Then read the entire last two paragraphs.

Previewing doesn't give you all the details. But it does keep you from spending time on things you don't really want—or need—to read.

Notice that previewing gives you a quick, overall view of *long, unfamiliar* material. For short, light reading, there's a better technique.

2. Skim—if it's short and simple

Skimming is a good way to get a general idea of light reading—like popular magazines or the sports and entertainment sections of the paper.

You should be able to skim a weekly popular magazine or the second section of your daily paper in less than *half* the time it takes you to read it now.

Skimming is also a great way to review material you've read before.

Here's how to skim: Think of your eyes as magnets. Force them to move fast. Sweep them across each and every line of type. Pick up *only a few key words in each line.*

Everybody skims differently.

You and I may not pick up exactly the same words when we skim the same piece, but we'll both get a pretty similar idea of what it's all about.

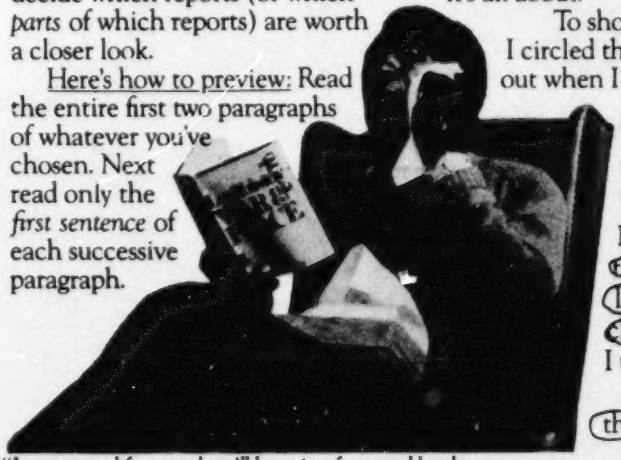
To show you how it works, I circled the words I picked out when I skimmed the following story. Try it. It shouldn't take you more than 10 seconds.

My brother Russell thinks monsters live in our bedroom closet at night. But I told him he is crazy.

"Go and check then," he said.

I didn't want to.

Russell said I was chicken.



"Learn to read faster and you'll have time for a good laugh with Mark Twain—and a good cry with War and Peace."

"Am not," I said.

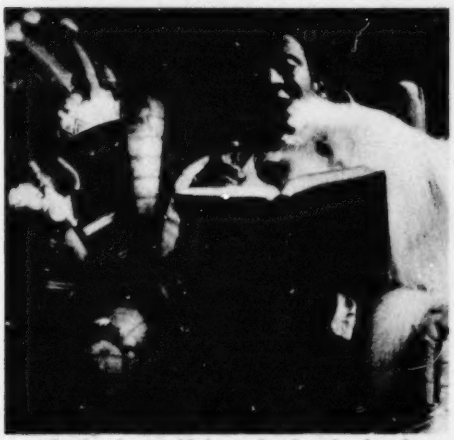
"Are so," he said.

So I told him the monsters were going to eat him at midnight. He started to cry. My Dad came in and told the monsters to beat it. Then he told us to go to sleep.

"If I hear any more about monsters," he said, "I'll spank you."

We went to sleep fast. And you know something? They never did come back.

Skimming can give you a very good *idea* of this story in about half



"Read with a good light–and with as few friends as possible to help you out. No TV, no music. It'll help you concentrate better–and read faster."

the words–and in *less* than half the time it'd take to read every word.

So far, you've seen that previewing and skimming can give you a *general idea* about content–fast. But neither technique can promise more than 50 percent comprehension, because you aren't reading all the words. (Nobody gets something for nothing in the reading game.)

To *read faster and understand most*–if not all–of what you read, you need to know a third technique.

3. Cluster–to increase speed and comprehension

Most of us learned to read by looking at each word in a sentence–*one at a time.*

Like this:

My–brother–Russell–thinks–monsters...

You probably still read this way sometimes, especially when the words are difficult. Or when the words have an extra-special meaning–as in a poem, a Shakespearean play, or a contract. And that's O.K.

But word-by-word reading is a rotten way to read faster. It actually *cuts down* on your speed.

Clustering trains you to look at *groups* of words instead of one at a time–to increase your speed enormously. For most of us, clustering is a *totally different way of seeing what we read.*

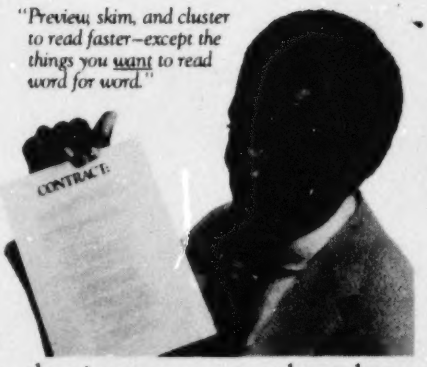
Here's how to cluster: Train your eyes to see *all* the words in clusters of up to 3 or 4 words at a glance.

Here's how I'd cluster the story we just skimmed:

My brother Russell thinks monsters
live in our bedroom closet at night.
But I told him he is crazy.
"Go and check then," he said.
I didn't want to, Russell said
I was chicken.
"Am not," I said.
"Are so," he said.
So I told him the monsters
were going to eat him at midnight.
He started to cry. My Dad came in
and told the monsters to beat it.
Then he told us to go to sleep.
"If I hear any more about
monsters," he said, "I'll spank you."
We went to sleep fast. And you
know something? They never did
come back.

Learning to read clusters is not something your eyes do naturally. It takes constant practice.

Here's how to go about it: Pick something light to read. Read it as fast as you can. Concentrate on seeing 3 to 4 words at once rather than one word at a time. Then reread



"Preview, skim, and cluster to read faster–except the things you want to read word for word."

the piece at your normal speed to see what you missed the first time.

Try a second piece. First cluster, then reread to see what you missed in this one.

When you can read in clusters without missing much the first time, your speed has increased. Practice 15 minutes every day and you might pick up the technique in a week or so. (But don't be disappointed if it takes longer. Clustering *everything* takes time and practice.)

So now you have 3 ways to help you read faster. Preview to cut down on unnecessary heavy reading. Skim to get a quick, general idea of light reading. And cluster to increase your speed *and* comprehension.

With enough practice, you'll be able to handle *more* reading at school or work–and at home–*in less time*. You should even have enough time to read your favorite comic books–and *War and Peace*!

Bill Cosby

Years ago, International Paper sponsored a series of advertisements, "Send me a man who reads," to help make Americans more aware of the value of reading.

Today, the printed word is more vital than ever. Now there is more need than ever before for all of us to *read* better, *write* better, and *communicate* better.

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